

GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND CHILD CARE FACILITIES ON HEAD LICE

Disease Investigation and Surveillance Branch California Department of Health Services

These guidelines are provided to assist elementary schools, preschools, and child care facilities in educating parents how to safely and effectively control head lice and prevent transmission to other children.

Even though head lice do not transmit any diseases, it is strongly advised that schools adopt a “no-nit” policy to reduce the opportunity for children with hatching nits to be re-admitted to a group environment. This practice will assure parents that the school is doing all it can to stop any lice problem. The principal components of a “no-nit” policy are early detection through routine screening, comprehensive control through meticulous nit removal/combing, and distribution of educational material. Screening of all students should be conducted the first week of returning to school. (Use of a metal nit comb during screening may be very helpful.)

If a child is found with head lice, the child’s parents should be contacted and provided with the guidelines on control. Parents should be advised that all nits must be removed and the child treated prior to returning the child to school. A notification should be sent home with all children in the class, advising parents to check all their children for head lice (include the sheet on how to inspect, comb out nits, and treat for lice). Infested children should be re-examined by the school when they return.

Since it is possible for pillows, stuffed toys, and other classroom items to have nits or lice on them, those items can be placed in sealed plastic bags for two weeks (nits take 8-10 days to hatch) as a precaution to prevent hatching lice from getting a blood meal on a child’s head. Lice die within 1-2 days without a blood meal. Classroom carpets and rugs can be vacuumed daily. Washable items should be laundered in hot water, followed by heat drying for at least 20 minutes. THERE IS NO NEED TO APPLY PESTICIDES TO THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT OR AT HOME.

The most effective control measure is a thorough combing out of nits and lice with a metal nit comb, regardless of which product is used for treatment. Although time consuming, combing must be conducted EVERY day until ALL lice and nits are removed. Several brands of combs are available. The LiceMeister®* metal comb with long teeth is available from the National Pediculosis Association (800-446-4672), is easy to use, and costs about \$15. This and other effective devices may also be purchased at your local pharmacy.

The current product of choice is a cream rinse formulation containing **permethrin**, such as Nix®*. Do not treat a second time until 7-10 days following the first treatment. Treatment “failures” usually result from incorrect identification (not lice), not strictly following labeled directions, incomplete combing out of the nits (eggs), not realizing it may take 8-12 hours for lice to die, or re-infestation. If the above items have all been investigated and discounted, then resistance could be considered as a possible reason for treatment failure. If neither permethrin nor pyrethrin products are effective, one alternative is 0.5% malathion (Ovide®*), which requires a prescription. The label of this alcohol-based product states 8-12 hours contact time is needed, then remove nits with a fine-toothed comb.

There is no convincing scientific evidence to support the use of products such as vinegar or advertised compounds to dissolve the glue on the nits (to ease their removal) or kill the nit. Similarly, there is no documented scientific data to support claims that mayonnaise or olive oil on the hair “suffocate” the nits and lice.

Please contact your local health department if there are additional questions. These guidelines will be posted on the Department of Health Service web site at <http://www.dhs.cahwnet.gov/ps/dcdc/html/publicat.htm>.

*Use of a product name is for identification purposes only and does not constitute endorsement.